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United Nations reform: measures and proposals: the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations

Regional hearings in preparation for the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations: hearing held for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at Tokyo on 9 and 10 September 1999

Note by the Secretary-General

In preparation for the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, and at the request of the Secretary-General, regional hearings have been convened by the executive secretaries of the five regional commissions for a representative segment of civil society, with the participation of members of the commissions. The purpose of the hearings was to produce proposals aimed at strengthening the role of the Organization and ensuring its continued relevance in the twenty-first century.

The report on the hearing for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, held at Tokyo on 9 and 10 September 1999, is transmitted herewith.

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Hearing held for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at Tokyo on 9 and 10 September 1999

I. Introduction

1. The hearing for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), held in preparation for the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, was convened at the United Nations University at Tokyo, on 9 and 10 September 1999.

2. The hearing, opened by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Japan, who served as the presiding officer of the meeting, consisted of four working sessions. Three moderators, Ronald Huisken, Department of Defence (Australia) Cielito Habito, The Earth Council (the Philippines), and Razali Ismail, President of the fiftieth session of the General Assembly (Malaysia), chaired the sessions devoted to, respectively, the following themes: peace and security; economic and social development; and human rights and good governance. Thirteen panellists introduced the above-mentioned themes. Other participants, representing Member States of the Asia and Pacific region and a cross-section of civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic and research institutions, the media and the private sector, numbered 143.

3. The presiding officer chaired the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the fourth thematic session. At the latter session, the strengthening of the United Nations was discussed and summaries presented by the above-mentioned moderators were heard. A summary of the outcome of the hearing is set out below.

II. General discussion on the United Nations

4. The hearing noted at the outset that the global challenges of peace, security, development, human rights and good governance confronting mankind were closely interlinked. In effectively addressing these challenges at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was therefore essential, first of all, to conceptualize and design, at the national, regional and international levels, integrated and coherent policies.

5. The meeting underlined that the United Nations was the only global organization with competencies to address the totality of global concerns and challenges. Moreover, its comparative advantage as the sole organization with quasi-universal membership and wide mandates, an extensive network in countries and territories and linkages and partnerships with various sections of the civil society compelled the United Nations to further its leadership role and activities for the betterment of the human condition, particularly in the developing world.

6. In view of the changing circumstances and emerging challenges, the hearing considered that a revitalized United Nations was urgently required. It was noted that the rapid process of globalization of the international economy had, inter alia, exposed the limitations of national Governments in solving increasingly complex problems. This recent development had triggered an increased demand for international public goods, including a peaceful and stable environment, stable and transparent markets and economic processes, equitable development, environment preservation and the promotion of human rights and good governance.

7. To meet these diverse challenges and aspirations, the revitalization of the United Nations presupposed a genuine reiteration by Member States of their commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and its objectives, which must translate into the effective individual and collective exercise of the responsibilities of all Members in pursuance of the Charter. In this connection, it was emphasized that responsible membership entailed the design of rational mandates and the timely endowment of resources for the effective execution of those mandates.

8. The meeting also recognized that, in view of the presence of other multilateral organizations with specialized mandates, such as the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, as well as the limitation of resources, the United Nations should develop its leadership role in the resolution of global challenges. It should provide the

vision, set the agenda, prescribe standards, monitor and evaluate progress and foster global partnership, encompassing international, regional, subregional and national as well as business and civil society organizations.

9. The meeting also took note of the revival of proposals for the direct participation of people and recalled that the Preamble to the Charter starts with the sentence "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to ...". These proposals included the establishment of a world parliament directly elected by the people, an advisory body to the General Assembly comprised of eminent personalities and the establishment of the World NGO Forum.

III. Peace and security

10. The meeting noted that threats to peace, as well as political instability and social unrest were often rooted in conditions of underdevelopment, poverty, inequality and poor governance. To offset these threats, it was recognized that the promotion of equitable social and economic development and good governance was not for its own sake alone, but because it was the best guarantor of peace and security. In this respect, it was deemed important to promote a partnership framework between the United Nations, regional and subregional organizations, Governments and civil society at large, with a view to ensuring the maintenance of peace and security.

11. During the last decade, the world has witnessed major changes that have significant bearing on the effective maintenance of peace and security. The following developments were considered to have had a profound impact on the future role of the United Nations in the area of peace and security:

(a) The end of the so-called cold war and, with it, the abated risk of strategic nuclear war;

(b) The drastic reduction of inter-State wars and the high incidence of intra-State disputes and conflicts, often along ethnic rather than ideological lines;

(c) An international political landscape characterized by localized zones of active or latent turmoil;

(d) The reconsideration of the basis of the concept of national security over international security and, as a corollary, of the concept of national sovereignty;

(e) The tendency of localized conflicts to reach subregional dimensions and the risks they pose to international peace and security;

(f) The drastic rise of international terrorism and international crime, including trafficking in women and in narcotic drugs, all of which impinge on human security;

(g) The relative shift of economic and financial power;

(h) The volatility of international capital markets.

12. While noting that the above-listed developments brought about new challenges related to the maintenance of peace and security, the hearing underlined that many threats associated with the so-called cold war, such as nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, remain a constant concern.

13. The meeting reiterated that the United Nations was the only global organization dealing with peace and security. Its active role was, therefore, indispensable in managing global peace and security, including the timely and effective actions against State and non-State actors pursuing actions in violation of the Charter, international law and international humanitarian law.

14. The meeting called first and foremost for a systemic reform of the Security Council, the principal organ entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security, which should include enlarged membership of the Council with a view to reflecting and representing the current international and regional balance of economic and military power. A call was also made for a transparent decision-making modus operandi of the Council.

15. Regarding the representativeness of the Security Council, the meeting underlined that the Asia and Pacific region had been particularly under-represented in that organ.

16. The hearing held the view that some permanent members of the Council had made abusive use of their veto power. It recommended that the use of veto prerogatives be qualified and that, moreover, the General Assembly fully assume its present legislative responsibility with respect to the maintenance of peace

and security and that it be granted oversight capacity for the Security Council.

17. The hearing was of the opinion that, in exercising its mandate, the Security Council should be more proactive in preventing conflict. In other words, its efforts towards peacemaking rather than simply peacekeeping should be enhanced and pre-emptive diplomacy should be accorded a higher priority, in line with chapter VI of the Charter on the pacific settlement of disputes. In addition, attention should be paid to the development of an effective peace and security information system, including a robust early-warning system capable of detecting threats to peace or other forms of insecurity and more frequent use of private diplomacy and regional security arrangements should be encouraged to prevent conflicts. The meeting also recognized that the Asia and Pacific region still lacks a viable region-wide security arrangement.

18. The meeting noted the increase in intra-State conflicts, often characterized by gross violations of the principles of international humanitarian law, including the targeting of civilian populations and children. Regarding intervention, including military intervention, to resolve such conflicts on humanitarian grounds, the consensus was that such intervention should be governed by clear and transparent policies and procedures within the framework of the United Nations.

19. The meeting recommended that in order for the United Nations to be efficient and effective, it should be endowed with adequate resources, including the availability of rapid deployment military forces at the disposal of the Security Council.

20. A number of unfinished items, namely disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, remain on the agenda of the United Nations. The meeting felt that a world platform for multilateral disarmament should take precedence over bilateral agreements and that the role of the Security Council in setting the agenda and priorities for effective disarmament should be strengthened.

21. The United Nations should also pay more attention and devote more resources towards the elimination of international terrorism and crime, which has been rising rapidly, particularly in recent times. As this activity is often linked to drug trafficking and money laundering, measures aimed at controlling those activities are urgently needed.

IV. Economic and social development

22. The meeting noted that globalization provides new opportunities for growth and development worldwide through the much freer flow of goods, services, technology, capital and information and, more generally, through the creation of conditions conducive to the more efficient functioning of competitive markets. In view of the frequent failure of markets to yield equitable development, the hearing underlined that, especially in recent years, globalization has been accompanied by widening income disparities among, as well as within, countries and regions. The major challenge was to seek ways to reap the benefits of globalization while mitigating its ill effects, especially those affecting the most vulnerable and marginalized nations and segments of society. In this context, the role of the United Nations was crucial.

23. The meeting underscored that poverty eradication remained an unattained goal of international development cooperation. Despite its rapid growth, the Asia and Pacific region was still the home to the majority of the world's poor. Moreover, the rapidly ageing structure of the population has become an impending challenge for the twenty-first century.

24. A holistic approach to development was essential in addressing the challenges posed by, inter alia, poverty, rapid urbanization, and ageing populations. In implementing its mandates pertaining to these problems, the United Nations should provide a global vision, set standards and guidelines and catalyse actions by other involved institutions and stakeholders. In view of its comprehensive mandates, representativeness, quasi-universal membership, structure and linkages with various segments of the society throughout the world, the United Nations was considered to be uniquely poised to address new challenges.

25. The hearing pointed out that in such an increasingly complex world, no single national Government or agency was capable of comprehensive and integrated development. The United Nations, therefore, was called upon to strengthen its development partnership framework through closer coordination and collaboration with various multilateral organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization, and to foster closer cooperation among its own bodies, including the specialized agencies.

26. The meeting further stressed that sustainable development required a partnership among all stakeholders in development, namely national Governments, the private sector, NGOs and other civil society organizations. The partnership needed to materialize at all levels of interaction, local, national, regional and global, and at each stage of the development process encompassing planning and policy-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The United Nations should contribute to strengthening such partnerships.

27. It was noted that the process of globalization generated a rise in the demand for international public goods. As the role of the United Nations was critical in facilitating or providing them, a strengthened Economic and Social Council would be indispensable for that purpose. In this regard, there was a need to change the composition and scheduled sessions of the Council so as to enable in-depth substantive deliberations of items on its agenda. The view was expressed that it was incumbent upon the international community to reaffirm the leadership role of the Council in economic and social matters, as well as its function of coordinating the specialized agencies.

28. The view was also expressed that permanent committees under the Economic and Social Council, such as a "Committee on Economic Development" and a "Committee on the Environment", could be established. Also, panels of independent experts should be constituted to advise the Council in dealing with such issues as short-term capital flow, rising global monopolies, poverty eradication, micro-credit support, counter-productive tax competition among countries and youth-related and disability-related matters.

29. Development requires sound institutions. Indeed, there has been a recent heightened recognition of the critical role of institutions in promoting successful development. In this regard, owing to its role as a neutral partner, the United Nations was in the best position to provide technical expertise in areas of institutional capacity-building in developing countries. This included capacity-building in the field of macroeconomic management as well as other areas of governance.

30. The hearing considered that access to knowledge, technology and information was critical to local communities and to developing countries for the promotion of better living conditions for all peoples. It was recognized, however, that inequality of access to, or lack of, technology and information may be an even greater factor than income disparities between industrialized and developing countries in furthering the growing gap between them. The United Nations was called upon to assume critical and much needed leadership in addressing these imbalances.

31. The hearing advocated a sounder and stronger financial base for the United Nations if it is to live up to the challenges of the twenty-first century and to the expectations of the peoples it represents. A sustainable financial resource base needed to be set up, which would include the payment of membership dues based on capability.

V. Human rights and good governance

32. The meeting noted that human rights and good governance were critical subjects of our time and that the region was strongly committed to universal values of human rights. As human rights were indivisible, the promotion of civil and political rights should be carried out in tandem with the promotion of the right to development, including equitable access to health, education and other social services. Indeed, human rights could not flourish in the absence of development, democratic institutions and good governance. Poverty, it was emphasized, was a gross violation of human rights. Countries should be encouraged to set time-bound targets for the elimination of poverty and for the upholding of other economic, social and cultural rights of people.

33. Effective enforcement of human rights required public awareness of such rights, effective monitoring institutions and continued advocacy by various segments of the society, including NGOs. In this respect, it was noted that serious gaps at the national level were evident. These shortcomings were also to be found at the regional and subregional levels where human rights had not been granted sufficient importance on the agenda of regional collaborative initiatives.

34. The meeting recalled that transparency, accountability and adherence to the rule of law and participatory political and social processes were fundamental elements of successful governance. In

many instances, however, these principles were being heralded and complied with on a pro forma basis.

35. Special measures to address the challenges faced by vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly and the disabled were necessary given the lack of adherence to national and international legal instruments and guidelines promoting equal access and opportunities for these vulnerable groups. It was further noted that armed conflict and other forms of violence impacted more severely on children, women and older people and entailed serious psychosocial traumas and physical disabilities on these segments of civilian populations.

36. It was emphasized that women were caring for the young and the elderly to a disproportionate degree and were being inadequately compensated for their labour. This reality, which was further exacerbating gender-biased inequalities and hampering social development, required proper attention.

37. The hearing rejected the Western-centred interpretation of the discourse on Asian values as a negation or rejection of individual rights. It recalled that, whereas Western thinking on human rights generally placed a distinct emphasis on individual political and civil rights, Asian thinking on the subject was predicated on more communitarian values and principles. In this regard, the United Nations was called upon to calibrate its efforts and human rights activities to take the values of different civilizations and cultures into account and to dovetail the promotion of individual and communitarian human rights principles.

38. The hearing recognized the immense contribution made by, or under the aegis of, the United Nations to the promotion of human rights and good governance by the setting of norms and the development of international human rights instruments; however, the Organization's ability to monitor and ensure compliance with legal obligations needed to be enhanced.

39. In this respect, the United Nations should also be encouraged to promote and support the formation of human rights organizations at the national and regional level and to provide technical assistance to Governments as well as to the media and civil society organizations to strengthen their respective monitoring capacities. Moreover, the United Nations should be endowed with adequate resources and vested with appropriate authority to take adequate measures in the event of massive gross violations of human rights.

VI. Concluding remarks

40. During the last decade, in particular, the Asia and Pacific region has experienced a period of relative peace and, until recently, rapid and equitable economic growth. The region still faces, however, enormous challenges regarding peace and human development in the twenty-first century as trouble spots in the region, both between and within countries, posing potential serious threats to peace and security, remain. Widespread poverty and inequality, challenging peace, violations of human dignity and social stability and environmental degradation, hampering sustainable development, are serious problems with consequential negative long-term effects. To respond to these problems, a serious, integrated and holistic approach to development, necessitating a broad vision and firm action by Governments, peoples and supra-national bodies, needs to be collectively and collaboratively pursued. No single Government would have the capacity and wherewithal to handle these problems alone.

41. The support for the United Nations and its objectives, as embodied in its Charter, remains overwhelmingly strong in the Asia and Pacific region. Indeed, the hearing underscored that the United Nations was a source of great hope for humankind. The Organization, therefore, required support and resources and, against the background of its many shortcomings in exercising its mandates, the hearing urged a serious effort towards a systemic reform of the Organization.

42. The hearing felt that the participation of the Asia and Pacific region in the United Nations processes was not commensurate to the relative political, economic and social importance of the region and appealed to Governments and civil society in the region to enhance participation and contribution to all workings of the United Nations.

43. The hearing also supported increased participation of civil society organizations in the workings of the United Nations. It considered that proposals towards a permanent civil society assembly or a world parliamentary assembly, organically linked to the General Assembly, with a view to reinforcing the ownership of the United Nations by the people of the world, merited serious consideration.

Annex I

Hearing for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, held in preparation for the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations

Programme of work

Thursday, 9 September 1999

08:30-09:30	Registration
09:30-10:00	Opening ceremony Statement by Hans van Ginkel, Rector, United Nations University, Tokyo Statement by Adrianus Mooy, Executive Secretary, ESCAP Statement by Miles Stoby, Assistant Secretary-General, Coordinator of Preparations for the Millennium Assembly, United Nations Secretariat Keynote address by Nobutaka Machimura, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Presiding Officer of the Regional Hearing
10:00-10:15	"The United Nations in the 21st Century" Presentation by Yozo Yokota, Japan Association for United Nations Studies (JAUNS)
10:30-13:30	First session: Peace and security Moderator: Ron Huisken, International Policy Division, Department of Defense, Australia Introductory statements: Li Daoyu, Former Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations and the United States of America Satish Kumar, former Professor, Jawaharla Nehru University, India Ijaz Hussain, Professor and Chairman, Department of International Relations, Quaid-I-Azam University, Pakistan Mitsuru Kurosawa, Professor and Dean of Osaka School of International Public Policy, Osaka University
11:15-13:30	Discussions
15:00-18:00	Second session: Economic and social development Moderator: Cielito Habito, Earth Council, Manila, The Philippines Introductory statements: Ryokichi Hirono, Professor Emeritus, Seikei University, Japan Pawadee Tonguthai, Professor, Faculty of Economics, Thammasat University, Bangkok Jim Waroka, Deputy Director, Solomon Island Development Trust, Solomon Islands Hak-Su Kim, Ambassador for International Economic Affairs, Republic of Korea
16:00-18:00	Discussions

Friday, 10 September 1999

10:00-13:00	Third session: Human rights and good governance Moderator: Razali Ismail, President, 50th Session of the General Assembly,Malaysia
	Introductory statements: Mohan Man Sainju, Chairman, Institute for Integrated Development Studies, Nepal Rosalinda V. Tirona, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila Ms Ching Chabo, Director, Economic and Social Policy Department, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)
11:00-13:00	Discussions
14:30-17:00	Fourth session: Strengthening the United Nations Presiding Officer: Nobutaka Machimura, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Japan
14:30-15:15	Special presentation: Hisashi Owada, President, Japan Institute of International Affairs
	Concluding remarks on Session 1: Ron Huisken , Moderator of Session 1 Concluding remarks on Session 2: Cielito Habito , Moderator of Session 2 Concluding remarks on Session 3: Razali Ismail , Moderator of Session 3
15:15-17:00	Discussions
17:15-18:00	Conclusions and Closing ceremony Nobutaka Machimura, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Japan Presiding Officer of the Regional Hearing for Asia and the Pacific
	Adrianus Mooy, Executive Secretary, ESCAP Miles Stoby, Coordinator of the Millennium Assembly, United Nations Hans van Ginkel, Rector, United Nations University, Tokyo

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Annex II

List of panellists and participants

Hearing for the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, held in preparation for the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, Tokyo, 9 and 10 September 1999

A. Member of the Commission

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Mr John Quinn, Minister Counsellor, Australian Embassy

Bangladesh

H.E. Mr Jamil Majid, Ambassador, Bangladesh Embassy, Tokyo

Mr A.F.M. Sarwar Kamal, Economic Minister, Bangladesh Embassy, Tokyo

Mr A.K.M. Nashirul Huq, Deputy Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, Dhaka

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Nepal:

Mr Narayan Shumsher Thapa, Special Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu, Nepal

Pakistan:

Mr Fida Hussain, Economic Minister, Embassy of Pakistan, Tokyo

Philippines:

Hon Ms Rosalinda V. Tirona, Assistant Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila

Mr Julius Torres, Department of Foreign Affairs, Manila

Mr Benito B. Valeriano, Minister and Consul General, Embassy of the Philippines, Tokyo

Mr Meynardo LB Montealegre, Embassy of the Philippines, Tokyo

Republic of Korea:

Mr Hong-ghi Choi, Deputy Director, United Nations Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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B. NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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